

Through History's Empty Space

by Haus am Gern

Alas, mankind is at the mercy of time, of time and space. Time is a force that defines human beings from beginning to end, from the Big Bang to the frozen ends of the universe. There is no life outside of time. Still, the discussions of how to transcend time are many and varied. Time travel may be a familiar concept in science fiction, literature and films. Yet even if we should ever succeed to travel in time, the notion of time remains – and so does history. The idea of creating a space untouched by history is a contradiction in itself and beyond the reach of imagination. It is a synonym for eternity and, thus, a synonym for paradise or hell. Or death. Essentially, it's the ultimate question of mankind.

For the symposium at the Nida Art Colony, Haus am Gern invited the historian Prof. Dr. Nijole Strakauskaite, a senior research fellow at Klaipeda University, to lecture on the unique history of the Curonian Spit with reference to a particular work of art by Haus am Gern in Leipzig, Germany. The lecture took place at the Thomas Mann House, a location chosen by Prof. Dr. Nijole Strakauskaite.

After providing a short account of the Curonian Spit's complex history before WW II, Prof. Dr. Nijole Strakauskaite described the particular situation in this part of Europe after the invasion of the Russian Army in 1945 as a "history free space" in order to show how, for decades, this region had become a kind of "blind spot" in history.

In doing so, she referred to the "history free space" of LIFETIME EUROPE in Leipzig, where, on an existing allotment garden plot, Haus am Gern built a free-standing structure measuring 2.10 x 2.12 x 2.14 meters. The space was designed as a 'clean room'

according to EN ISO 14644 contamination control standards. It consists of an anteroom with storage for protective clothing as well as the actual dust - and history - free space. An air conditioning system controls the climate in the room and slight positive pressure prevents the infiltration of dust particles. Haus am Gern declared this room a “history free space”. The “history free space” was cleaned, certified, locked and sealed by a specialized company and has not been entered since. Both the garden and the “history free space” are being cared for by a family of five from Leipzig with the support of a neighboring tenant. The allotment garden with the “history free space” is open to the public for guided visits on request. LIFETIME EUROPE, the “history free space” in Leipzig, is a paradox. Man is at the mercy of time and space. Only art has the power to virtually go beyond.

The symposium’s goal was “to reinvent the format of presenting and sharing art, knowledge and experience. One of the key features of contemporary culture is the changing role of the artist, who sometimes assumes the role of a researcher and curator, and vice versa. Where are the borders of these roles? How could a serious researcher and theorist do a performance, and how could a playful artist do serious research and theorize?”

Haus am Gern assumes that interdisciplinarity is, in fact, an intellectual construct. Something that we should not only be aware of but that we should radically ignore – because life itself, under normal conditions, is only alive inter (between) disciplines.